

## STUDENTS' INTEREST IN LEARNING GRAPHIC NOVEL'S IN THE MALAYSIAN SECONDARY CLASSROOM

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### ABSTRACT

*Graphic novel is popular in young adult literature due to their illustrations and less usage of words. In the Malaysian secondary classroom, the selection of literary texts is prescribed by the Ministry of Education. The students learn the genres of poems, short stories, novels and graphic novels. However, the students only learn graphic novels for a year during their five-year secondary school. The aim of this study was to find out the students' reasons for and interest in learning graphic novels during secondary school. The methodology of this study was a survey design that involved a purposive sampling of 80 students from an institute of teacher education in Malaysia. This study collected quantitative data through a survey questionnaire which was analysed descriptively. The findings show that the students preferred graphic novels that were interesting and enjoyable. They also showed that they would like to learn more than one graphic novel in the classroom. The implications are on text selection and more choices of graphic novels by curriculum planners to sustain students' interest in learning literature.*

Keywords: Interest, graphic novels, elements of literature, literature learning

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

A graphic novel is very popular among young people and is a type of young adult literature (Bucher & Lee, 2004). It is a book made up of comics with entertainment content in it. Although the word novel normally refers to long fictional works, the term graphic novel is applied broadly and includes fiction, non-fiction, and anthologized work. A graphic novel delivers meaning and enjoyment through its dynamic format of images and words (Simmons 2003). Like a comic book, it comprises boxed pictures and text and may have several boxes per page. As in a picture book, the illustrations enrich and extend the text.

In Malaysia, English is taught as a second language in schools. Since the introduction of literature in the English Language syllabus in 2000, the students were exposed to literature so that they could improve their proficiency. The literary textbooks were prescribed by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the students had to study various genres such as poems, short stories, graphic novels and novels. The students studied graphic novels in Form 1, which was only one year in secondary school. The aim of this study was to find out the students' reasons and interests in learning graphic novels during secondary school. Therefore, the research questions for this study are:

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

- i. What are the reasons that affect students' learning of graphic novels?
- ii. To what extent do the students' interest influence their learning of graphic novels?

### **3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Similar to comic books, graphic novels interlace rich, animated visuals with a partial amount of text to drive the narrative. The stories are written and illustrated in the style of a comic accompanied by vivid pictures and captions while the story unfolds in a clear sequence which is often action-packed and funny (Reading Rocket, 2017). The genre of graphic novels can be historical fiction, fantasy, science fiction, and fairytales, history, biography, and information (Reading Rocket, 2017).

There are distinguishing elements between graphic novels and comic books. Basically, they are longer than comic books because they cover a wide array of genres and subject matters. In addition, they contain complete narratives, whether or not they are a part of larger series. According to Bucher and Lee (2004), comic books are produced with greater frequency than graphic novels, often arriving on a weekly or monthly schedule. The comic-style illustration is also popular in other countries. For example, anime and manga, both of which originated in Japan, are popular worldwide. Similarly, both comics and graphic novels can contain complex characters with detailed backstories and inner conflicts.

The elements of graphic novels especially illustration entice teenagers. According to Sullivan (2002), a reason graphic novels appeal to teens is because it has a quick and visual format that is similar to televisions, internet, and video games. Teenagers also enjoy the development of characters through dialogue, which gives a more realistic slant to the story that usually has edgier themes. Thus, reading graphic novels is a great way to enrich students' vocabulary as well as develop a deeper appreciation of literature.

Allen and Ingulsrud's (2003) findings indicate that students who like manga do so for a variety of reasons, including the fact that the content is often misunderstood and criticised by adults, and reading manga is therefore a way for teens to resist adult authority. Another finding indicates that readers of manga are eager to learn more about another culture and language, namely, Japanese (Mori, 2007). All these graphic novel elements have helped reluctant readers, especially teenagers to reengage themselves with reading.

In Brenna's (2012) findings show that the Grade 4 students preferred graphic novels that aligned with their preferences for reading narrative novels and non-fiction, and did not align with preferences regarding comics or cartoons. Wong et. al (2017) also found that students who read the graphic novels expressed a greater interest in exploring the topic further. Therefore, graphic novels is closely related to students' interests.

### **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

The methodology of this study was a survey design that involved a purposive sampling of 80 students from an institute of teacher education in Malaysia.

#### **4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The design of this study was a survey research. It is used to describe the existence, amount, and context of the research questions (Issac & Michael, 1997).

## 4.2 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The survey questionnaire was formulated in a Google Form. Then, the link was distributed to the students and they were requested to answer the online questionnaire. After the researchers received the online responses through Google Forms, the results of the questionnaires were downloaded as Excel spreadsheets.

## 4.3 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The survey questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section contained three items of the literary texts that were prescribed by the ministry and the students indicated their choice of preference for a graphic novel. The second section consisted of an open-ended question that required students to give their reasons for the selected texts.

## 5.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected were analysed descriptively based on the frequency and percentages of the items.

### 5.1 Results of Students' Preferred Graphic Novels

Figure 1 shows the students' preference of graphic novels that they had learnt in Form 1, the majority of the respondents (48.1%) chose 'King Arthur', whereas 29.9% opted for '20,000 Leagues Under the Sea' and 22.1% preferred 'The Swiss Family Robinson' as their choice.

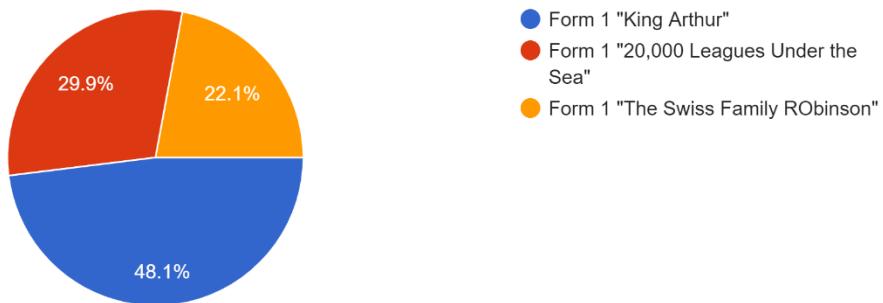


Figure 1 Students' preferred graphic novels

### 5.2 Results of Students' Reasons for Learning Graphic Novels

Table 1 shows some of the comments given by the students regarding the selection of graphic novels which were categorised into (1) Types/Genres of the story, (2) Elements of graphic novels (setting, themes, storyline, moral values, illustrations), (3) Interesting, (4) Learn only one text, (5) Other reasons, (6) No reason.

**Table 1:** Students' reasons for learning graphic novels

No	Reasons	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Some students' responses
1.	Interesting	25	31.3	I like it. King Arthur is an interesting story.

2.	Types/ Genres of the story	6	7.5	I really love it as it was my first ever approach for literature. It's such an interesting story and I would like to read this kind of story again in the future I choose this graphic novel because it has a fantasy element in it. I like King Arthur because I always love stories related to history or fairy tales.
3.	Setting	2	2.5	Because the place setting is the palace area; making me visualise myself living in it. Because the novel King Arthur has castle area as their place setting; making me feel like living in a fantasy.
4.	Theme	3	3.8	I love family theme. It highlights family love. Because this novels really shows the bond between a family.
5.	Storyline	7	8.8	The storyline is great. The storyline is fantastic an amazing. The plot really captured me.
6.	Moral Values	3	3.8	It teaches a lot of moral values. I valued the loyalty of Merlin. I really like this graphic novel because there are many moral values.
7.	Illustrations	8	10	It has really beautiful graphic that will attract me to read more. I enjoy learning 'The Swiss Family Robinson' as the graphic of the novel is eye catching and the novel is not that boring. Personally, I don't really recall how the storyline goes but I do love graphic novels because it is much more fun to read compared to just texts.
8.	Learn only one text	6	7.5	This novel is the only one I read and learned at school. Among those three novel, I only study about this novel. I've learned King Arthur only.
9.	Other reasons	8	10	(will be discussed later)
10.	No Response	12	15	-
TOTAL		80	100	

Overall, the students enjoyed learning graphic novels in the classroom. The majority of the students enjoyed learning graphic novel as it was interesting (31.3%). The second highest reason was the illustrations of the story which was 10%. Then, its interesting storyline (8.8%), followed by the genre of fantasy, history and fairy tales (7.5%). 7.5% of the students had also

expressed their eagerness to read more than one graphic novel that was prescribed to them by the Ministry of Education. A few students expressed that they enjoyed learning the graphic novels with family love theme (3.8%), good moral values (3.8%), and the palace setting (2.5%).

There were eight students who gave other reasons for reading graphic novels. Their reasons are as below:

- i. It's easy to understand.
- ii. It stimulates the students' imagination.
- iii. I've been exposed about this story since I was kid.
- iv. I have read this story from my sister.
- v. Because it narrates an underwater world of which not many people know about it.
- vi. Honestly, I don't really understand this graphic novel and because of that, I think that I want to study about it again.
- vii. I've never learn any.
- viii. I don't remember any of the graphic novels but I choose King Arthur since the novel is quite famous from mouth to mouth during my school year.

There were about 15% of the students who did not give their response as the Google Form did not make it a mandatory for the students to give their reasons in learning graphic novels.

## 6.0 DISCUSSION

The leading choice of the preferred graphic novel is 'King Arthur'. 48% of participants chose this graphic novel because it has a fantasy element in it. It is a story that is related to history or fairy tales. The participants also enjoyed it because it was a legend and classical story to be remembered.

They also highlighted the fact that they love it as it was for some of them the first-ever approach for literary texts. 'King Arthur' is an interesting ancient old story to most of the participants. It is also linked to other media such as the TV series 'Merlin'. This made them embrace the effort to expand their interest beyond the printed text. This made the graphic novel more appealing to the participants.

It was not easy to get young adults to read. Therefore, more exposure to graphic novels will ensure positive engagement with the selected texts (Bucher & Lee, 2004). All the findings are as proof of the research impact on the participants and education caretakers. Above all, it was easy to comprehend the story through engaging colourful illustrations to make students read more.

The findings of this research will benefit English language teachers in the Malaysian secondary schools. This is because the teachers can tap and expand their interest in the preferred graphic novel genres and titles. More focus can be given to the students' choices so that language learning can be more vibrant and robust. It will also benefit the policymakers because the choices reflected the most current interest for students in the Malaysian school system (Ganakumaran, 2003). Malaysian students will have the chance to explore more diverse titles based on the preferred titles and genres reflected in this finding. More similar genres and titles can be used in Malaysian secondary schools or institutions of higher learning like the Matriculation centres or the Form 6 centres.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

The findings show that the students preferred graphic novels because they are interesting, illustrative; Hence, enjoyable to read. A great reading moment experienced by students was portrayed through students' excitement in reading more than one graphic novels in the classroom.

However, the limitation of this study is it utilises only an instrument of the survey questionnaire. Thus, it is suggested to include qualitative instruments such as interviews or reflective journals to obtain more in-depth opinions from the students. In the future, it is also recommended to conduct experimental or quasi-experimental research to find out the students' understanding of literary texts through various teaching and learning strategies of literature.

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